

AN INTERPRETIVE APPROACH TO FICTION TEXT ANALYSIS BY EFL STUDENTS (BASED ON THE SHORT STORY “THE BADNESS WITHIN HIM” BY SUSAN HILL)

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У статті розглядається інтерпретативний підхід до аналізу художнього твору, обґрунтовується поєднання лінгвістичного та літературознавчого підходів до тлумачення твору в рамках курсу «Інтерпретації тексту» як одного із ключових засобів формування у студентів філологічної й соціокультурної компетенції та критичного мислення.

Ключові слова: інтерпретація тексту, різночитання художнього твору, інтерпретативна спільнота, філологічна й соціокультурна компетенція студентів факультету іноземних мов.

The paper considers an interpretive approach to fiction text analysis; the combination of literary and linguistic vectors that are applied within the course of Text Interpretation Studies is justified. The discipline is considered as a means aimed at providing stimuli to EFL students' critical thinking, facilitating awareness of cultural variety, developing accuracy and ability to analyze the text, forming linguistic and literary competence.

Key words: Text Interpretation Studies, multiaspect analysis of literary pieces, an interpretive community, philological and sociocultural expertise of EFL students.

The discipline of Text Interpretation is one of the subjects included into the curriculum of the pedagogical university graduate students majoring in EFL and literature. As the main academic objective of the course is to teach a multispect analysis of literary pieces based upon various reading strategies, achievements of modern literary criticism, linguistics, culture and social studies, philosophy, history etc. are to be taken into consideration. All the mentioned humanities are supposed to form background knowledge, skills, and appropriate reading experience necessary for such a multiperspective vision of a fiction work that combines linguo-stylistic analysis with an interpretive critical approach.

Nowadays, an interpretive analysis engages a number of perspectives: linguo-countrystudy [1], literature and culture studies [2], stylistic and discursive analysis [3], polycritical literary analysis [5; 6; 7], intertextual and narratological studies [9; 10], empirical method perspective [8], etc. Any of them can work separately, though the complex of strategies would contribute to a more profound, novel vision of a literary text.

In spite of the fact that a literary text has always been an on object of various researches, the pedagogical university curriculum limits a number of text-oriented subjects to Stylistics, World Literature, Philological (Linguistic) Text Analysis, and Interpretation. Thus, the acuteness of the issue is highlighted by the potential of the Text Interpretation Study to combine both literary and linguistic parameters of such an approach that much depends upon the competence of a student as a reader and an interpreter.

So, the **main objective** of this paper is to justify the interpretive perspective to text analysis in forming linguistic and literary expertise of EFL students of a pedagogical university.

A student approaches any text with his/her own reader's expectation as any interpretation is subjective. On the other hand, students are united in the so called interpretive community – "a group of readers whose common interests explain why and how they tend to interpret a text's invitations in a similar way" [11, 74]. Except race, age, ethnic and other basic similarities, 'the community of the readers' classroom' turns out to be the most essential one as it is marked by the knowledge obtained from the linguistic and literary subjects covered within 4-5 years of the university study. To somehow systematize and limit the vectors of text interpretation it is possible to arrange its parameters within the following chart:

TEXT INTERPRETATION CHART

Reading Strategies/ perspectives	Paradigms of the text	Syntagmatics of the text	Semantics of the text	Pragmatics of the text
Formalist	1. The textual	1. Temporal characteristics:		
Historical	paradigm:	a) Story dimensions;	1.	The message
Biographical	a) the	b) dynamics/statics;	Characters	of the
Marxist	functional	c) retrospection /	and their	text
Psychological	paradigm;	prospection;	linguistic	
Deconstructionist	b) the	d) expansion/compression	and stylistic	
Reader-Response	paradigm of	of story-time;	presentation.	
Feminist	genre;	e) space in the text;		
Mythological	c) the	f) the camera-eye effect.	2. The mood	
Onomatology	paradigm of the	2. Fragmentation of the text:	of the text.	
Imagology	author.	a) factual;	3. The	
Literary	2. The thematic	b) structural;	aesthetic	
violencology	paradigm.	c) functional.	information	
Character Study	3. Historical,	3. Integration of the text:	(including	
(Characterology)	ideological,	a) the title of the text;	poetic	
Narratology	cultural and	b) communicative relation	details; the	
Green Studies	literary	between fragments of the text /;	author's	
(Ecological	paradigm.	c) key-words and relations	aesthetic	
criticism)	4. Time and	between them;	intention;	
Intertextual	place	d) lexical and conceptual	expressive	
strategy	indicators.	chains.	means and	
others			stylistic	
			devices).	

Despite the idea of strict division of parameter groups (Paradigmatics, Syntagmatics, Semantics, Pragmatics, Reading Strategies) to interpret the text a student is to be aware of the fact that any piece of fiction should be viewed as a coherent, cohesed and complete unity. The latter one presupposes that neither single linguistic nor literary aspect can be scrutinized without considering other ones. Starting interpreting a piece, an EFL student grounds his/her judgments on idea of communication the participants of which are the author and the reader, while the text performs the function of a channel through which the message intended by the writer is transmitted. Consequently, the concept of an authorial intention seems to be a crucial one as the main task of the reader is to derive a variety of meanings from the text by trying to restore this intention in the form of the text's message as well as to decipher the 'world of the writer' and 'the world of the text' [11, 148-150].

Certainly, not all the parameters are equally essential for the interpretation of a particular literary piece for it represents a type of a free text being based upon the most general 'rules' of writing fiction. This idea provokes a critical approach to the interpretation on the part of a student who is to select the most productive elements as well as reading strategies that would lead him/her to achieving the main goal. Besides, choosing an appropriate reading strategy from the very beginning of the interpretive process determines further consideration of a prosaic piece with a special focus on its definite manifestations.

In the short story *The Badness Within Him* by S. Hill¹ it is possible to highlight the following parameters: the genre peculiarities, the authors' credo and aesthetic ideal, temporal and spatial characteristics, types of speech, symbolic connotation of space, syntactical and morphological expressive means and stylistic devices (a poetic detail including), integration and coherence of the text, its plot, character sketch, and conceptual metaphors.

As a rule a student starts with stating the most general things concerning a piece of fiction under consideration defining its genre and other aspects of a textual paradigm. Then he/she proceeds with indulging into more specific agenda attempting to derive different types of meaning that would provide clues to the understanding of its key issue – the message.

In the story *The Badness Within Him* Susan Hill suggested the case from the life of teenage Col that changed his perception of self and the surrounding world. The author invites the reader to witness the workings of the mind of the young boy, to share his inner doubts, hatred and fears. The poetic detail – *the badness within him* – (the reader may follow it running through the whole story beginning with its title) leads the recipient to realize that the feeling of guilt and psychological discomfort has become an integral part of the boy's character. One can suppose then, that the author's views are rather humanistic, for despite the melancholic mood (manifested verbally, stylistically, compositionally) in depicting the inner conflicts of a growing up personality, it performs a part of a mediator between adults and teenagers with the purpose to help the latter reduce sufferings of the "transition period".

Hence, the most adequate reading strategy that may be applied to the interpretation of S. Hill's story is psychological, not without some aspects of psychoanalysis, prompted by transparent reference to Oedipus complex that can be witnesses in portrayal of Col's feelings towards his father. The reader may come to such a conclusion having scrutinized the detailed description of the father's appearance alive or dead ("*And later, his father would join them for the weekend <...>, he would discard the blue suit and emerge, hairy and thickly fleshed, to lie on a rug and snore and play with Fay's baby <...>. He stood looking down at them all, <...> his father lying on his back, his bare, black-haired chest shiny with oil and his nostrils flaring in and out as he breathed; <...> his father's skin was oddly pale and shiny; <...> he had understood better why this strong barrel of a man <...> should have been so suddenly sinking <...>*"), Col's self-interrogation concerning the ties of blood and relations between him and his father ("*Col said, do I love my father? And thought about it. And did not know <...>. Col thought, we will never be the same with one another, the ties*

¹ The short story *The Badness Within Him* by S. Hill is included into the textbook for graduate EFL students: Паращук В.Ю. Практичний курс англійської мови: [підручник для студентів факультетів іноземних мов вищих навч.закладів] / [В.Ю.Паращук, Л.Ф.Грицюк, Б.Стивен Саум]. – К.: Т-во «Знання», КОО, 1999. – С. 172-181.

of blood make no difference, we are separate people now. And then he felt afraid of such truth”), attempts to perceive his actual feelings (“He stared, trying to feel some sense of loss and sorrow”).

Such constant search for the truth is stylistically manifested in the mixture of the author’s speech and represented speech or inner reported one. Its vivid example may be observed in the sentence sequence “*Col said, do I love my father? And thought about it. And did not know*”, where the direct speech is transformed in the represented one, intensifying thus the boy’s feeling of uncertainty or his intellectual efforts to understand the roots of ‘badness within him’. Similar function is assumed by the sentences “*Col thought, I am filled with evil, there is no hope for me. For he felt himself completely taken over by the badness within him or Col thought, I hate it here <...>. He hated the house itself the chintz curtains, <...> the muddle and shabbiness of it all*”. Or “*He thought, it is my fault. I prayed for some terrible happening and the badness within me made it come about. I am punished*”.

The leading motif of the story – inner world of the teenager going through the crucial periods of his life – is supported by a variety of poetic aspects that follow.

The presentation of the time, place and space components is one of them. It is not always easy to distinguish between the actual time (when the events took place) and the time of narration (when the events are narrated about), but for the cases of retrospection (Col’s memories about his childhood – an idyllic picture of the childhood, the object of his dreams while living in cool and gloomy London, his room that he used to like when a child etc.).

At the same time the direct chronology of events in the story is interrupted by deviations – descriptions and meditations. The latter two represent different kinds of space in the story. The description of nature varies from rather idyllic pictures, detailed and expanded, where the small boy was enchanted with sea creatures and butterflies, his own innocent perception of the world (“*He had been enchanted with everything <...>. In the sun lounge the moths and butterflies had swollen and cracked open frail <...>, and he and Jess sat up half the night by the light by the light of moon or candle, watching them*”) to the presentation of the surrounding scenery still, peaceful and soothing in itself but depressing and irritating for a vulnerable child’s soul stylistically emphasized by polysyndeton (“*He did not want the sun and the endless stillness and brightness, the hard-edged shadows and the steely gleam of the sea*”).

In addition to this outer space, the reader feels sure of the inner – psychological and emotional – space as well. The author pays very much attention to it, for it is essential in understanding the message. The vivid emphasis on the inside space makes the story rather static even if to consider the tragic accident that happened to Col’s family. A great degree of statics is achieved by meditations, introduced by the words ‘to think’, ‘to know’ and presented by groups of sentences showing Col’s mind in action (“*But if he had changed, the others had changed too*”).

Fay <...> was different, she fussed more, was concerned with the details of things <...>. And Jess did not want his company. <...> Then, he knew that the change has come, knew that the long, hot summer was at an end, and that his childhood had ended too, that they would never come to this house again”).

Besides, it is possible to specify the symbolic connotation of space: for Col the room, he used to enjoy in his childhood, appears to be a limited space and symbolizes a very tiny area that restricts his ambitions, no matter what they are, and eliminates any changes so natural for person’s development. Col’s aspiration to forget the past and to look into the future is prevented by the house as old as sepia photographs on the walls.

One can also draw a symbolic dichotomy of the “*endless stillness and brightness*” of the summer seaside and the emotional state of the boy. While the rest of the family (Fay, Jess, Col’s parents) were overwhelmed by soothing contentment of doing nothing, of having a respite from plans and time-tables, Col wished he could waken them out of that state and would find enough strength in himself to bear the summer’s routine. The boy realized he hated everything. Being distantly repeated the phrase “*I hate it*” signifies the feeling of anger and hatred that turned out to be the essential for the young creature. The sentence has been contextually modified as though S. Hill aimed at deciphering what the pronoun ‘it’ implies: “*I hate it here <...>. He hated the house itself <...>. I hate you*” (meaning Jess).

In the long run every person, every trifle, having lost its value and importance, became a constant irritant for Col. And probably it is not occasionally that he compares his family with insects, stressing their awkward and meaningless behavior as viewed by the protagonist.

In attempts to break the pattern of hot, still days, leading nowhere, Col prayed for a storm (the strength of his voluntary prayer is shown by epithets *'urgent'* and *'hysterical'*); he wanted to make some violence. In this sense 'the badness' may be understood as an inevitable condition for a possible violence as the same 'badness' was the reason for Fay's saying that Col had got a 'black dog on his shoulder' (the idea is repeated for several times and its effect is intensified by the lexemes *'enormous'*, *'coal black'*, *'monster of a dog'*), or the family's being displeased with everything the boy was doing or was not (*"I do so dislike you just hovering over us like that <...>. He doesn't want anyone else to enjoy themselves"*).

Another parameter that supports the key idea of the story is its plot. Having analyzed the work one can say that the composition comprises the main structural elements. The first paragraph in the story may be seen as its nouement that includes a case of cataphora, or rheme marked by the personal pronoun *'he'* (*"The night before, he had knelt beside his bed and prayed for a storm, an urgent, hysterical prayer"*). Such a beginning presupposes the reader's expectancy for the storm (or what it may stand for) to take place. While reading the story the recipient is constantly aware of the growing suspense achieved with the help of contextual synonyms with the negative connotative meaning (*'badness – cancer – black dog – illness'*; *'storm – violence – quarrel'*; *'bear – hate – hurt'*; *'to be angry – irritable – afraid – exhausted'*; *'to kick viciously – forcefully'* etc.), antonymic notions (*an adult – a child – a teenager*; *past – future*; *storm, violence, quarrel, change – the pattern of still days, gentle routine of summer; separate people – the ties of blood*); syntactic repetitions, key concepts, etc. that integrate all the basic elements of the story. As a matter of fact, the expectancy is not defeated: the terrible event as if the answer to Col's prayer occurred and that was the change he had been longing for.

To round off Col's fictional portrait one should take into account the haunting blaming of himself that was probably prompted by the attitude of the family members towards the boy. As a result – the inferiority complex: *"Jess did not want his company <...>. If you can't keep still, you're just spoiling everything <...>. Why can't you find something to do?" <...>; he just wants to sulk <...>. Col, do watch what you are doing near the child"*.

The frame structure of the story, the title and the final sentence having the same key conceptual metaphor *'the badness within him'* make the story coherent. It is also interesting to follow the way Susan Hill associated 'the badness' with a living being: *"<...> a badness which was living and growing like a cancer <...>; Col felt his own anger like a pain tightening around his head"* endowing such metaphoric comparisons with extreme expressive power.

Thus all mentioned textual and stylistic peculiarities contribute to the realization of the probable message: any person who is undergoing the ordeal of formation needs someone whom he could rely on no matter what kind of "badness" is within him [4, 114-117].

No doubt, the suggested sample does not claim to be the only one. It is one of many possible visions if to infer from the following statements: any interpretation is of a subjective nature; it is not a final or complete one; any interpretation cannot be erroneous. So, an interpretive perspective of fiction text analysis provides the necessary stimuli to EFL students' critical thinking, realizing the creative potential of a literary piece as a coherent unity marked by its own textual, literary and linguistic features.

It would be thus of interest to study other approaches to the analysis of the text as a means of facilitating awareness of cultural and social variety, developing accuracy and ability to understand, discuss and analyze the text, forming profound philological and sociocultural expertise as well as pluralistic outlook of EFL students.

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ВІДОМОСТІ ПРО АВТОРА

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Наукові інтереси: інтерпретація тексту.